BACCALAUREATE ADDRESS

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I have been living these recent months with an acute awareness of "last things", and if I hadn't that awareness on my own, it would have been impressed upon me in quiet, friendly reminders as people have remarked on countless occasions: "Do you realize this is your last....". It adds to each event a quality of good remembering and at the same time urgency. "If this be the last, it should be the best or the most". This morning, my last baccalaureate, I felt the distressing urgency to tell you <u>everything</u> I know and believe about <u>everything</u> from the nature of TRUTH ~~or the UNIVERSE~~ to the best way to plant a sweet marjoram seed. Noticing the symptoms of this in me, Mrs. Armstrong pinned a gentle hint on my bulletin board in the form of an anonymous prayer from which I quote in part:

> Father, thou knowest that I am growing old. Keep me from becoming talkative and possessed with the idea that I must express myself on every subject. Release me from the craving to straighten out every one's affairs. Keep my mind free from the recital of endless detail. Give me wings to get to the point... Teach me the glorious lesson that occasionally

I may be wrong...With my vast store of wisdom and experience, it does seem a pity not to use it all. But Thou knowest, Lord, that I want a few friends in the end. Amen.

Well, I do want a few friends in the end, so I shall confine myself to shaping a few words around what for me is at the center of what I believe we've been trying to do together at Middlebury. Let me ~~try first~~ begin with a parable used by a great teacher, Sigmund Neumann. The scene ~~is~~, in any home, a living room, at the end of a long day. A weary father was reading a magazine while his young son girated about him asking questions. Hoping to get some peace and quiet, the father tore a map of the world from his magazine, divided it into tiny pieces and asked his son to put the pieces together. In three minutes his son returned with the puzzle completed. The father was astounded and asked how his son had done the job so quickly and so well. The son replied, "It was easy, Dad. On the other side there was a picture of a man. I put the man together and the world came out all right."

O.K., how do we get the man together? Into so great a mystery there are bound to be many roads leading to this Rome. The one that seems among the most likely to lead to that good end, and therefore the one that I have chosen to follow (and encourage and sponsor) is

clearly marked education, and especially liberal education We've been on that road together these past four years, sharing the day to day that finally adds up to today. I often find it hard to remember that I'm trying to get the world together when I'm budgeting for a leaky roof or arbitrating matters of high import like the desirability of self-closing faucets. You surely wondered what cosmic contribution you were making when you mastered factual material in a course which seemed less than helpful in solving world problems or even solving your own current one~~s~~, ~~or~~ getting a job.

Well, let me draw you a quick sketch of a man I read about recently in the New York Times. For 23 years he had been a drug addict, then for several years he'd been engaged in the tough task of getting himself together and now he's involved in a program designed to help others get themselves together. "The first thing", he said", he noticed when he got into the program was that people were talking about things he'd never heard of--things like values, principles and convictions". As far as he was concerned, "values were what you got at Macy's, principles ran high schools, and convictions were what you got from the judge!" Well, I am sure that in four years as Robert Frost says "just hanging around" you got familiar with values, principles and convictions, so

you're already ahead--indeed those things even sound closer to an ingredient in a recipe for a better world than faucets and facts (translate technology and information).

Someone once said that education is finding out what you didn't even know you didn't know, and if I may sort of reverse that--when you find yourself in the throes of job hunting or applying to graduate school, wondering what good your education is to you, I suspect even you don't know how much you really do know. The day after Commencement you may have already forgotten the date of the Battle of Hastings and the last part of that mathematical formula is a bit hazy, but perhaps, just perhaps you come closer to resembling that educated man or woman ~~which~~ Woodrow Wilson described so wonderfully well:

> "The educated man (~~and~~ or woman) is to be discovered by his point of view, by the temper of his mind, by his attitude toward life, and by his fair way of thinking. He can see, he can discriminate, he can combine ideas and perceive whither they lead (not so easy); he has insight and compassion. His mind is a practiced instrument of appreciation. He is more apt to contribute light than heat to a discussion, and will oftener than another show the

power of uniting the elements of a difficult subject in a whole view; he has the knowledge of the world which no one can have who knows only his own generation or only his own task." That man or woman could really get the world together!

The world is indeed torn, separated into jagged fragments by ignorance and regionalism, heedlessness and fear--separated even by basically acceptable things like love of country, differing ways of living and language, eating and conducting day to day human affairs--separated by have and have not, by can and cannot, by will and will not. How desperately we need Wilson's educated person (or a reasonable facsimile)! To put the pieces together on any scale we need persons who are or who have the vision to value this kind of together person, this fair way of thinking, this attitude of mind which allows him really to see, not just look, to discriminate, not discriminate against, to combine ideas and see whither they lead and not as G. K. Chesterton says: with "no sense of honor about ideas....having them all at once in one wild intellectual harem, no matter how much they quarrel and contradict each other," to have real insight and wise compassion, not just a view of appearances only and instant sentimental reaction.

His mind is a practiced instrument of appreciation (I like that). Practice. That's what you've been doing.

In the end I do not think the arts and sciences ~~do not~~ teach so much as they <u>exercise</u> us, give us patterns of excellence against which to test and assess, by which to make our choices. <u>Appreciate</u>--a word which associates a wide variety of things. It would seem sensible, for instance, to know something of the rules and traditional conventions governing the Japanese Noh Play before deciding out of hand that it resembled nothing so much as a mad group of ill-equipped performers howling their dissatisfaction at some incomprehensible director-deity which irrationally controlled the natural inclinations of the actors, all to the patternless interruption of drum whacks and flute whines. It would help to understand that the texture of mashed potatoes was as repugnant to our Japanese summer faculty as perhaps raw fish to the average American palate.

And was there a time when you thought Shakespeare a writer of difficult plays, dealing with irrelevant times in archaic and arcane language? That was B.C. (before Cubeta)!

And what of the educated person's contributing light rather than heat to a discussion. One may infer this touches all mankind and encircles the globe, from the story of the American observing an obviously heated argument between two Chinese in the street. The American inquired why no blows were exchanged. He was told that

to strike your opponent was to admit you had run out of arguments. At Middlebury no one runs out of arguments A.D. (after Dean Dennis).

As to uniting elements of a difficult subject in a whole view--for this kind of gift which the world needs so desperately, that of seeing the elements which unify before the elements which divide and destroy, there is need for "knowledge of the world which no one can have who knows only his own generation or his own task." So when we in the liberal arts college hear the criticism "but you have trained me for nothing," we can only answer what we deeply believe: "we have educated you for anything." Whatever <u>your</u> task in your time and your generation, you will bring to it that larger frame, that awareness of other times and other places.

Some years ago when we were faced with erupting violence and dark shadows fell over all the campuses of this nation after the invasion of Cambodia and the deaths at Kent State, the students at Middlebury wisely turned to one of our own historians for the sanity and perspective which they felt we needed. Professor Nicholas Clifford was asked to speak at Commencement. This was a time of impatience, of non-negotiable demands for instant remedies, of wild and bizarre inconsistencies of an SDS manifesto on human worth while the SDS ignited campuses and destroyed

human life. In this volatile context Professor Clifford spoke movingly and convincingly of the importance of a sense of history. "If only that which we have directly experienced becomes real to us, we become nothing more than atomistic, self-centered individuals...we are immensely narrowing our vision. We would cut ourselves off from everything that has been real for those who are members of other parts of the human condition..."

Now, Charles Shultz's Lucy has a way of expressing the cussedness of Every Man.

C.B.: What do you think of the past?

Lucy: I pay no attention to the past.

C.B.: Well, what do you think of the future?

Lucy: I never think about the future.

C.B: Well, what of the present?

Lucy: The present drives me crazy.

No wonder the present drives her crazy. It makes no sense apart from the past.

In the reading from Learned Hand there were echoes of Wilson's sense of what sort of person is needed to "have at" the problems our world faces, what sort of person it will be a delight to be in the same world with. Hand suggests he will "need an endowment as rich as possible in experience, an experience which makes the heart generous and provides his mind with an understanding of the hearts of others."

Finally education seems to have ~~to have~~ to do with

a "temper of mind" and strangely also a disposition of the heart, to make it all come right. You cannot describe this educated woman or man without speaking sooner or later of the heart.

Now it is time to conclude for if I were to follow where these ideas lead me down the hallways of my mind and experience, I would fail to heed Mrs. Armstrong's gentle hint--and my mind is a practiced instrument in appreciation of her judgment.

I close with a passage which I love and which I share with you from my own professional experience in the classical heritage of our western world. I cite it because it draws together the inner and the outer person, the self and the other in a harmony which I would pray there might be for all men. I know of no other passage with which I would prefer to bid you farewell and which has at the same time blessed wings to the point.

It is a country scene by the banks of the gently flowing Ilissus River in Athens at the end of the 5th century B.C. Beneath a plane tree a teacher and a student are just completing a long discussion of the use of words in the search for truth. As they finish their conversation, the teacher Socrates says to Phaedrus, his friend and student:

Socrates: Should we not offer up a prayer to the local deities.

Phaedrus: By all means.

Socrates: (And Socrates prays) Beloved Pan, and all ye other gods who haunt this place, give me beauty in the inward soul; and may the outward and inward man be at one. May I reckon the wise to be wealthy, and may I have such a quantity of gold as a temperate man and he only can bear and carry. Anything more? The prayer, I think, is enough for me.

Phaedrus: Ask the same for me, for friends should have all things in common.

Socrates: Let us go.